

AMHERST COUNCIL ON AGING MINUTES

October 14, 2004

Members Present: Jean Haggerty, Chair; Doris Holden, Treasurer; Elsie Fetterman; Hank Peirce; Susan Whitbourne, Barbara Sutherland, Al Byam, Frank Lattuca

Absent: Joan Keochakian

Staff Present: Nancy Pagano (Interim Director/Program Director), Maura Plante (Program Director/Services), Karen Erman (Administrative Assistant)

Others: Gerald Weiss (COA Liaison & Select Board Member), Barry DelCastilho (Town Manager), Marge Babb.

Welcome

Meeting called to order at 9:05 AM. Jean welcomed all members and guests. She then introduced Marlene Barnett as the newest staff person who is working at the Senior Center three days a week, Wednesday, Thursday and Friday. Marlene gave a brief history of her background and interests and gave a brief overview of the tasks she is working on at the Senior Center:

- Wednesday Bread Program - Coordination of the donated breads and produce that is picked up by volunteers and distributed to low-income seniors in the Large Activity Room each Wednesday morning.
- Student Volunteers – Coordination of incoming student volunteers to match them up with Senior Center programs.
- Outreach – Helping with outreach to seniors/matching people with resources.
- Musical Showcases – Arranging for participants for the bi-monthly Senior Center musical showcases.

Minutes of Meeting

Minutes of September 9, 2004, were reviewed and accepted as written.

SENIOR TRUST

Treasurer's Report:

Doris Holden reported that there was a slight increase in the Senior Trust investments. The total assets are \$86,243.79. She has renewed the Northampton Cooperative Bank Certificate of Deposit (\$8,180.81) for a short term maturing on March 17, 2005 at an interest rate of 1.55%. The balance in the Northampton Cooperative Bank checking account is \$6,875.19. Also, Doris has received a bill for the Nurse's salary for the first quarter of FY'05 (July 1st to Sept. 30th). The Treasurer's Report was accepted as written.

Request for Money from the Program Grant:

Maura gave a brief overview of the Caregivers Support Group. This is a group of people who are primary caregivers for a parent, partner, or older relative. Maura does not have the skills to facilitate this group and has found another facilitator, Laura Pravitz, with 20-years experience who is a licensed independent clinical social worker. Laura will work with the group for eight weeks. The goal is for the group to become self-facilitating. Maura requested a transfer of \$800.00 from the Senior Trust Program Grant to pay for the facilitator for an 8-week session, 1 ½ each session. Susan Whitbourne stated that she has clinical psychology students willing to do work like this for free once they are trained.

The COA approved the request for \$800 transfer of funds from the Program Grant for the facilitator for 8 weeks.

SIDEWALK CONSTRUCTION UPDATE

Gerald Weiss asked if there is an ADA issue with the sidewalk design concept especially with the design changing from one pattern to another. The alley between Starbucks and Douglass Funeral Home called "Pleasant Walk" has been completed with the new design which is a concrete walkway. The expansion joints are on a diagonal with pavers as edging. The Main Street design when finished (up Main Street to Subway) will not be the same design. This design is pavers with a concrete edging. Jean stated that Pleasant Walk is much easier to maneuver for people with walkers and wheelchairs. The paver sidewalk is jarring and uncomfortable. Jean also stated that the Town needs to consider doing all the other "bad" street sidewalks before any Main Street sidewalk construction. Maura will bring up the question of pattern change from one to another at her next DAAC meeting on Monday, October 18th.

Gerald stated that there is a new finance request for sidewalks scheduled for Town Meeting. Last year a lesser amount was funded for sidewalks. They will look at the best way to proceed. Pleasant Street, in front of Bangs and Kellogg Avenue will be done next.

UPCOMING BUDGET PREPARATIONS AND OUTLOOK

Barry DelCastilho outlined upcoming budget preparations and outcome projections. He stated that the budget process is going to be long and complicated for FY '06 projections. Local aid is right now a guess. Assumptions about the level of increases and such have been put into a spreadsheet. Barry has presented an "overly optimistic" guess about local aid; he thinks it will be up for FY '06. There are increased expenses and fixed and mandated costs that will affect the budget. One emerging issue that the Town is facing is health insurance costs. The Town of Amherst has not experienced a hike in health insurance costs as it is self-insured. With health insurance the town pays 75% of the cost of the employees' premium and insured pay 25%. Barry said, "It appears that things have caught up with us". The trend is that there are more claims. Approximately 1M is needed for town, school and library and this means an increase in premiums for employees. With all predictions it looks like a 1 ¼ M deficit. Each department head has been given budget information and is asked to prepare and present three budgets:

- status quo - Level funded, no position increases but fixed costs. There is no Congregate Housing and this is an increase that needs to be considered in the Status Quo budget.
- needs – What is needed to provide high quality services to the town. Barry believes that four full-time positions are needed, less the DAAC piece that Maura does. The Center Activities needs to be increased.
- 2% reduction – 2% decrease from FY '05

Barry then gave a brief overview of what is coming up in the next six months. The new Financial Director, John Musante, will assemble the budget information from all departments and in approximately three months he will present his recommendations to the Finance Committee and then to the Select Board. The local aid projections are then updated and there will be more meetings to coordinate all budget requests. Then in about six months the Finance Committee and the Select Board will take a vote on the budget.

Another factor is the consultant. This is on the same time frame as the budget. Hopefully this will lead to some consensus on what will need to be done. The question is will the consultant's recommendations impact what the budget will be. Barry wants the Financial Director, John Musante, to know what other "pots of money" the COA has such as the Senior Trust, Senior Center Club and the Travel Club. What needs to be known is how much "tax support" the COA needs. Barry understands that there is some money for programs that is not provided through tax support.

Jean Haggerty stated that the COA members want staff that is supported by Town funds. Nancy Pagano is doing two jobs, Interim Director and Program Director. Nancy needs staff support. A full-time Social Worker and Administrative Assistant should be tax supported. The population is becoming older and we need to keep what we have on a full-time tax supported capacity. Marlene is working at the Senior Center three days a week on a temporary basis, but we need more support from the town and the community. Susan Whitbourne stated that demographics support this argument. There are increasing numbers of older people who are frail and trying to maintain their health. We need to emphasize preventative aspects and this means programming that emphasizes older people. Barry stated that he supports the Senior Center staff but until the results of the consultant are known the Senior Center is in an interim situation.

Elsie Fetterman asked if when an employee retires, does the money come out of their budget? Did any buy back money come out of the COA budget when Barbara Slovin and Maureen Vanhoutte retired and John Clobridge resigned? Barbara and Maureen's retirement was part of the town retirement plan and John was paid out of FY '05 COA salary budget. Maura is now the only Social Worker and she also spends one day a week working for the DAAC. Right now Nancy is the only COA staff member who salary is paid totally with Town money.

Barry stated that he hears there is a need for a full-time social worker that is paid for by the Town.

Gerald Weiss stated that there looks like there was a \$24,000 cut in the COA budget in FY '04 & '05. Barry stated that this often happens when people retire and are replaced by lower salaried people. Also, the Senior Center Director has resigned and the position has not been filled yet due to the consultant. Gerald stated that the COA budget must include a "restoration of loss of services".

Frank Lattuca said we should prioritize what staff positions are needed the most, and that will that make the chances better for getting what is needed. Barry stated that a list of needs will be discussed and prioritized. The first priority is to replace the Congregate Housing money, DAAC and Karen and Maura being full-time Town staff. Center Activities money needs to be restored too.

Al Byam stated that the Governor has changed the formula for local aid and Amherst will benefit due to the student population and their lower income. Barry stated that this might provide funding for DAAC. He is optimistic about local aid and how the formula will help Amherst.

Elsie asked if the funds for the consultant are being taken out of the COA budget. Barry answered no.

STAFF REPORTS

FY05 GRANTS UPDATE (Nancy and Maura)

1. DEA Formula Grant

Nancy reported that the Department of Elder Affairs Formula Grant for FY '05 has increased 10% which is good news. This money was supporting Karen's position in FY04, but the intent of the grant is for outreach, so it will be going towards Maura's salary in FY05.

2. HVES Grants for FY '05

Grandparents as Parents Grant

A "Caring Community" grant of \$2,475 was received from HVES for the "Grandparents as Parents" Program. Maura explained the support group meets monthly in Northampton in the fall and in Hadley in the spring, and is a support and education group for kin who are caretakers of their grandchildren. Childcare is provided. These grandparents as older kin really never planned that their role would be to take care of their grandchildren and they need help. The children range in age from 3 ½ to 12 years and the older kin are between the ages of 50 to 70. There are many issues that they are challenged with. They have taken over in situations and they need guidance and support. Many are low-income people which can be a strain on the older kin. Some of the issues they deal with are behavioral issues, developmental disabilities, and school issues. This forum helps them to cope. This grant will provide for money for childcare staff and a facilitator, games, books, arts and craft supplies for use with the children, refreshments and two gatherings during the year.

3. Hot Lunch Program Grant

Nancy stated that the hot lunch program was funded again at \$0.91 a meal. Highland Valley pays for the food and delivers it to the Senior Center. The Site Manager gets the food delivered to the homebound and runs the lunch site here at the Bangs Center. Highland Valley pays the Senior Center \$.91 per meal given in the congregate and home delivered programs. This money pays for the Site Manager's salary and a small mileage stipend for the drivers.

FUEL ASSISTANCE

Maura explained the Fuel Assistance Program. People who want to apply need to see her and she will help them fill out the forms. There are more people applying this year for fuel assistance than last year. Also, Nancy and Maura have just found out that the Salvation Army is offering fuel assistance for people who are not eligible for the Fuel Assistant Program.

STATISTICS CONFIRM GROWTH, WEDNESDAY BREAD PROGRAM

Maura explained that the social work information and referral numbers have increased because she began to keep better track of the information. The numbers are much more relative. She was astonished to see what the numbers really were as she kept better track. The statistics are more comprehensive and give you a better sense of what goes on here at the Senior Center.

Nancy stated that there are more elders in need of food than is known. She asked the COA members to come to the Wednesday morning bread program to observe for themselves. This program is amazing to witness. With this program we are seeing desperation in Amherst and we are overwhelmed by it. We are trying to manage the program in a civilized way. Elsie suggested that the Bread Program would be an excellent place to offer other information that might be of benefit to people such as food stamps, fuel assistance, etc. We should take this opportunity to let these people about other low-income programs. All thought that this is a good idea.

There was a discussion on some people taking too much food (need vs. greed). Jean stated that some people are just hoarders. Nancy stated that this program is not an "all you can take program". The staff is trying to control this practice. Maura, Marlene and Nancy are forming a volunteer committee to oversee the Bread Program. This committee will discuss how to deal with issues with the program and to make things fair for all. Guidelines will be made by the committee.

FLU CLINIC

There is a strong possibility that the Flu Clinic scheduled for Friday, November 5th, will be canceled. The Health Department will keep the Senior Center informed if the situation changes. The Senior Center has been receiving many phone calls each day and have been advising people to contact their private health care physician for a flu shot. If we do get any vaccine, it will probably be strictly triaged.

SUBCOMMITTEE UPDATES

Finance

Budget preparation is a priority right now. Nancy will be working on the COA FY'06 budget and she needs help in preparing the three requested budgets (status quo, needs and 2% reduction).

The Finance Committee needs to begin working towards establishing a "Friends" group. Any money raised will come through the "Friends" group.

The December Senior Spirit newsletter will not contain the annual solicitation because of time constraints.

Transportation

Managing the new van has been time consuming and costly. There has been a safety recall on the van that needs to be taken care of. An all-weather tent shelter has been ordered for the van (\$2,024) and is expected to be delivered soon. The tent will be set up at the North Fire Station where the van is garaged. A battery retainer is needed to keep the battery charged when it is not in use.

Wellness

Cheryl Smith, Director of the Nursing Center, is now officially part of the Health Department so she will have the proper medical supervision for her clinical work. Nancy, Joan Keochakian, Epi Bodhi, Health Director, and Julie Federman, Public Health Nurse, met to discuss the program. There will be future meetings to keep us updated on the Nursing Center. Jean asked if the Trust will fund any overage of the \$10K for the Nurse's salary. Nancy stated that if there is any overage, the Health Department will be responsible to pay the Nurse's salary unless the Trust decides to fund any overage. There will be more discussion on this issue.

HVES

Barbara Sutherland had to leave the meeting early and she went to the Lesbian, Gay, Bi-Sexual, Trans Sexual Senior Training. She will give a report at the next COA meeting. Maura said that LGBT Seniors have issues and this training was to get together a task force to train around this issue.

OTHER BUSINESS:

Jean received a letter from Robert Gallant, Executive Director of Highland Valley. Elder Abuse is now also included as "self-neglect". This is now a part of the definition of "Elder Abuse".

Next Meeting is November 4, 2004, at 9:00 AM. (NOTE: The November 4th meeting was canceled and the next meeting will be Thursday, December 2, 2004)

The meeting was adjourned at 10:48 AM